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Manhood in America: A Cultural History

By Michael Kimmel



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For more than three decades, the women's movement and its scholars have exhaustively studied women's complex history, roles, and struggles. In *Manhood in America*, Third Edition, author Michael Kimmel argues that it is time for men to rediscover their own evolution. Drawing on a myriad of sources, he demonstrates that American men have been eternally frustrated by their efforts to keep up with constantly changing standards. Kimmel contends that men must follow the lead of the women's movement; it is only by mining their past for its best qualities and worst excesses that men will free themselves from the constraints of the masculine ideal.

The third edition discusses such timely topics as post-9/11 politics, "self-made" masculinities (including those of Internet entrepreneurs), presidential campaigns, and gender politics. It also covers contemporary debates about fatherlessness, the biology of male aggression, and pop psychologists like John Gray and Dr. Laura. Outlining the various ways in which manhood has been constructed and portrayed in America, this engaging history is ideal as a main text for courses on masculinity or as a supplementary text for courses in gender studies and cultural history.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In a startling, original study, Kimmel, a professor of sociology at the State University of New York, makes a persuasive case that manhood has been a constantly changing social construct in American culture. Once rooted in genteel land-ownership or in the pride of independent artisans, shopkeepers and farmers, manhood was transformed by the industrial revolution, which made American males, by the mid-19th century, insecure, mobile, competitive, chronically restive and seeking a sense of themselves as men through their economic success. Men attempted to prove their manliness through sports, business, bodybuilding, clothes, fraternal organizations, participation in two world wars and the Depression ("emasculating both at work and at home"). In 1936, Lewis Terman, inventor of the IQ test, introduced a sexist "M-F scale" that supposedly measured children's masculinity and femininity and their likelihood of "successfully" acquiring gender identity. Men today, observes Kimmel, spout angry antifeminist rhetoric in men's rights groups, or beat a defensive retreat via the men's movement's embrace of cosmic archetypes. Drawing on a wealth of material—advice manuals, union struggles, the symbolism of presidential campaigns, Tocqueville, Thoreau, contemporary films, novels and men's magazines—Kimmel's humane, pathbreaking study points the way toward a redefinition of manhood that combines strength with nurturing, personal accountability, compassion and egalitarianism. Photos.

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From Library Journal

Kimmel, a noted men's studies authority, coeditor of *Against the Tide* (LJ 2/1/92), and editor of *The Politics of Manhood*, reviewed below, presents in his own words the first cultural history of men in America. He examines how the manhood experience has not only defined American males but has also shaped the culture and livelihood of its members. Kimmel states the key driving force in men throughout history has been to prove their masculinity. He examines how this phenomenon has changed over time along with the masculine ideal and other transfigurations that must coexist with it. Holding up the model of the "self-made man" of American myth and legend for analysis, Kimmel describes the legend's birth prior to the Civil War and its lasting impact until the close of the 19th century. As the new millennium approaches, the author contemplates the contemporary crisis of masculinity. A core title for men's studies and gender studies collections alike.—Michael A. Lutes, Univ. of Notre Dame Lib., Ind.

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From [Booklist](#)

Asserting that no history of American manhood has been written before, Kimmel traces three male role models from the early federal period to the present. He derives them from the main characters in the first successful U.S. play, *The Contrast* (1787), by Royall Tyler. He dubs them the Genteel Patriarch, who is influenced by European manners; the Heroic Artisan, typified by the plain-spoken, independent farmer or craftsman; and the Self-Made Man, who has been the dominant U.S. male exemplar ever since. The strategies that Kimmel finds American men have used, over and over in various permutations, to measure up to the rugged individualism that the self-made ideal requires are also three: "obsessive self-control, defensive exclusion, [and] frightened escape." Kimmel highlights the aberrations (e.g., white racism, sexism) that have attended those strategies and concludes by proposing that men give up the battle to be "real men" as ultimately unwinnable. This is a cultural history as readable and fascinating as Kate Millett's epoch-making *Sexual Politics* (1970). *Ray Olson*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Richard Dunn:

This book untitled Manhood in America: A Cultural History to be one of several books that will best seller in this year, honestly, that is because when you read this e-book you can get a lot of benefit on it. You will easily to buy this kind of book in the book retail outlet or you can order it by means of online. The publisher of this book sells the e-book too. It makes you more readily to read this book, since you can read this book in your Cell phone. So there is no reason to you to past this reserve from your list.

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